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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Washington, D. C.

FIELD MEMORANDUM SCS #769

Re: Statement of objectives
and policies of the
Soil Conservation Service.

March 25, 1939.

TO ALL RANKING FIELD OFFICERS:

Following the recent reorganization of the Department, it was determined that reconsideration of the scope and objectives of the Soil Conservation Service would be necessary. As a result a committee was appointed to prepare a comprehensive statement.

The committee has completed its work and the attached statement has been cleared with the Department. It sets forth, I think rather clearly, the general functions of the Service, its objectives, and the scope of the work now included within the Service. You will note that among other things it sets forth some basic policies which are highly important, and these policies should be understood by everyone in the Service.

The attached statement should be distributed for the information and use of all key personnel.

LIBRARY
Soil Conservation Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D. C.

W. H. Bennett
Chief.

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

The Secretary of Agriculture has placed upon the Soil Conservation Service responsibility for the management of the Departmental physical land-use programs that involve the Department's participation in operations on agricultural lands -- including erosion control, submarginal land purchase and development, the agricultural phase of flood control, water facilities development, farm forestry, and drainage and irrigation.

The scope and objectives of the Soil Conservation Service have thus been greatly broadened. What was formerly an agency concerned primarily with the conservation of soil and water resources is now an agency concerned with promoting readjustments to achieve better land use and permanent systems of farming.

This statement defines the aims and purposes of the Service in light of this fairly recent development, and sets forth certain basic policies to guide the progress of the program toward those ends.

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BASIC OBJECTIVES

The basic purpose of the Soil Conservation Service, broadly stated, is to aid in bringing about desirable physical adjustments in land use with a view to bettering human welfare, conserving natural resources, establishing a permanent and balanced agriculture, and reducing the hazards of floods and siltation.

The program of the Service looking to this objective consists of several lines of action differing in method and immediate purpose but having a common ultimate goal of better land use, a better life for people living on the land, and protection of public welfare through flood control and prevention of siltation.

These complementary lines of action or component phases of the program as a whole, are as follows:

I. Soil Conservation.

Legislative Origin:

Soil Conservation Act of 1935. (Original program of the Soil Conservation Service.)

Objective:

To conserve basic soil and water resources by extending sound land-use practices to all private land vulnerable to soil erosion and public lands in cooperation with other agencies.

Activity Involved:

(1) Research determining the character, causes, and effects of soil erosion and the development of practical measures

for erosion control; (2) surveys made to determine the facts needed in planning and prosecuting erosion control and moisture conservation work; (3) demonstrations to illustrate the practical effectiveness of soil-conserving land-use practices, and to prove the techniques of erosion control through actual application on the land; (4) dissemination of information regarding erosion and its control through the ordinary media of public communication; (5) cooperation with Federal, State, and local agencies in the field of conservation, land-use adjustment, and related fields; (6) cooperation with and assistance to land-use action groups formed under the authority of State law.

II. Submarginal Land Purchase.

Legislative Origin:

Title III of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act of 1937. (Program formerly administered by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.)

Objective:

To correct social and economic maladjustments in rural areas by changing the pattern of occupancy and consequent use of land. Although the program deals directly with the conservation of physical and human resources, it involves consideration of those social and economic problems, such as land ownership and settlement, size of holdings, type of farming, and systems of local public finance, which

frequently must be dealt with before conservation can be reconciled with productive use of the land.

Activity Involved:

(1) The purchase of submarginal land or land not primarily suited to cultivation; (2) the development and improvement of purchased areas for sustained use; (3) the management of purchased land under uses to which they are adapted, or the transfer of such lands to appropriate Federal, State, or local agencies for administration; and, (4) cooperation with local groups of farmers and public agencies in furthering such programs as land use, water conservation, rural zoning, and more efficient and economical local government.

III. Flood Control.

Legislative Origin:

Flood Control Act of 1936 and supplemental legislation.

Objective:

To plan and carry out watershed protection measures with a view to reducing the hazard of flood to human life and property, and damage to stream channels, reservoirs, harbors, and ditches by deposition of eroded material.

Activity Involved:

(1) In cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Forest Service, preliminary examinations of authorized watersheds to determine the existence and seriousness of flood problems and the practical possibility

of alleviating flood hazards and siltation by land treatments; (2) in cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and Forest Service, surveys in authorized watersheds to obtain essential physical, social, and economic information and, on the basis of such information, to develop technically and economically sound plans for watershed treatment in the interests of flood control and prevention of siltation; and, (3) actual protection work on the agricultural lands of each watershed in accordance with the program developed through the surveys, and cooperation with the Forest Service which manages the protection work on forest-type lands of each watershed.

IV. Water Facilities:

Legislative Origin:

Water Facilities Act of 1937.

Objective:

To assist farmers and ranchers in the improvement and development of farm and range water supplies in arid and semiarid areas with a view to promoting better use of the land and advancing human welfare.

Activity Involved:

This program is limited to the seventeen Western states and is carried out cooperatively with the Farm Security Administration and Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and other agencies, through the Water Facilities Board. The

Soil Conservation Service is directly responsible for detailed planning and installation of facilities.

(1) In harmony with general plans developed by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, assisting farmers and ranchers in planning the development of water supplies which will facilitate improvements in land use; (2) to construct and install, or assist farmers to construct and install water facilities, such as wells, ponds, reservoirs, dams, pumps, springs, stock water tanks, spreading systems for utilizing run-off water, and similar improvements.

V. Farm Forestry:

Legislative Origin:

Cooperative Farm Forestry Act of 1937.

Objective:

To foster the practice of farm forestry in agriculture with a view to conserving soil and water resources, improving farm income, and aiding in the establishment of sound and economical land-use methods.

Activity Involved:

This program is carried out jointly with the Forest Service, Agricultural Extension Service, State Experiment Stations, State Foresters, and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. The Soil Conservation Service is responsible for the action phases of the program.

(1) Producing or procuring and distributing forest planting stock to farmers (Forest Service-Soil Conservation Service); (2) advising farmers regarding the establishment, protection, and management of farm forests (Extension Service-Soil Conservation Service); (3) investigating the economic and other benefits of farm woodland management; and, (4) training personnel in methods of bringing about the use of farm forestry practices in agriculture.

VI. Drainage and Irrigation:

Legislative Origin:

Agricultural Appropriation Act of 1932 and subsequent appropriation acts. (Programs formerly administered by Bureau of Agricultural Engineering.)

Objective:

To develop efficient and economical methods of draining and irrigating agricultural land with a view to promoting better land use.

Activity Involved:

(1) Investigation and reporting on laws and regulations affecting the organization and administration of drainage and irrigation districts and companies; (2) development of basic hydraulic information involved in the design of drainage ditches, tile drains, and pumping plants; (3) investigation of methods of applying irrigation water to farm lands; (4) development of apparatus for accurate measurement of the

quantity of irrigation water delivered to the farmer; (5) development of pumps and equipment for utilizing underground waters; (6) development of diversion dams and desilting works for diverting flood waters into irrigation canals; (7) the making of snow surveys for the purpose of forecasting irrigation water supplies; and, (8) operations carried out under the drainage programs.

BASIC POLICIES

In directing the program of the Soil Conservation Service toward its prescribed objectives, the following basic policies will be observed:

1. Advancement of Departmental Aims:

It is the policy of the Soil Conservation Service to direct and develop all phases of its work with a view to furthering the basic aims of the Department of Agriculture, which include stability of farm income, conservation of basic resources, greater security of tenure, and efficient production and distribution; to cooperate with the general planning agency of the Department and to key its various activities to the over-all plans and programs developed by the planning agency; and to cooperate with other bureaus of the Department in order to give unity and coordination to the work of the Department as a whole.

2. Program Unity:

The program of the Service is an entity made up of coordinate activities in several fields of land-use action. It is the policy of the Service to direct and administer these several complementary activities in a unified approach to land use and conservation problems.

3. Cooperation:

It is the policy of the Service to extend fullest possible cooperation and assistance to other agencies, local, State, or Federal, engaged in land use, conservation, and related activities; and to enlist the cooperation and assistance of such agencies in advancing the program for which the Service is responsible.

4. Program Development Through Local Groups:

It is the policy of the Service to participate in the county, State, regional, and national planning structure established by the Department and Land Grant Colleges in formulating plans for local action programs.

All regular action programs will be carried out through soil conservation districts or equivalent local organizations wherever feasible.

In developing the program of the Service as a whole, preference will be given to localities in which such local mechanisms for local cooperation exist.

5. Economic and Social Considerations:

It is the policy of the Service to give far-sighted consideration to the ultimate effects of proposed land-use adjustments on the economic and social well-being of the people involved in such adjustments; and to assure that land-use adjustments for immediate benefit will not eventually have undesirable economic consequences.

6. Selection of Work Areas:

It is the policy of the Service in selecting areas of work to give full consideration to the following:

- (a) The opportunity of advancing permanently the economic and social status of the people involved and for conserving natural resources of soil and water.
- (b) The existence of a soil conservation district or equivalent local mechanism for cooperative action.
- (c) The status of local land-use planning activities.
- (d) The attitude and initiative of local people and their interest in proper land use.
- (e) The value of proposed work as a practical demonstration of the nature and effect of good land-use practice, and the voluntary spread of such practice.
- (f) The appropriate geographical distribution of work areas.

